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Staff Collaborations to Enhance Teaching and Learning

Introduction

Collaboration, as its Latin roots suggest – labouring together – is the action of working with one or more people to produce or create something or to achieve a common goal. For collaborative projects to work, there must be a shared vision and commitment to the collaborative project – and to the team itself. A Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) must emerge that learns how to act and be together. Within this, trust, empathy, tolerance and communication are important: the genuine interest in the other that promotes bonding, belonging and dialogue. Thus, collaboration in education could be defined as a reciprocal, mutual activity in which problems are identified and solutions are developed collectively, and where contributions are equally valued and respected. This is different from top-down, hierarchical approaches where one party has the expertise or the answer – the power to make decisions. In a humane HE that is resisting the coercion and abjection of these neoliberal times (Hall, 2018, 2021), true partnerships and relationships in education are therefore vital (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). By enacting 'community' and co-creating, we can confront difficult and shifting realities, finding new solutions as actors and agents in our own processes. And, it is only through experiencing and enacting true collaboration that academic staff can model and enable this for their students. Staff need positive interpersonal interactions to enrich their practice for 'action' (Freire, 2007, 1998), the building of authentic curriculum spaces that catalyse true partnership, with each other and with students to create a HE of hope.

This section of the book presents inspirational examples of peer-to-peer collaborations to improve teaching and learning, outlining collaborative workings between discipline and professional staff within and across departments. The case studies reveal how academics 'broke out' of their silos, working together to create powerful learning spaces for their students which increased awareness of each other's roles and epistemological practices. Together, they navigated the supercomplexity of academia as they created and modelled what a humane, collegiate HE could look like.

The Case Study Chapters

In *Writing Retreats in Social Work* Kevin Brazant and Dee Tracey demonstrate what is possible when a learning developer and a discipline academic come together to interrogate student issues in disciplinary assessment. Together they developed a six-step writing retreat programme that could be developed for and integrated within any disciplinary context. They outline how to design and deliver meaningful free writing and peer-review activity where students co-create assessment understanding and develop self-efficacy.

Another such collaboration in Health Sciences – *Collaboration for Academic Literacies Development and Enriched Inter-professional Relationships* by Quentin Allan, Robyn McWilliams and Sue Raleigh – outlines how work between faculty staff and academic literacy tutors led to the identification of a gap in student engagement with assessment. They developed active and interactive writing resources to facilitate sessions with students, using authentic writing exemplars to make transparent otherwise opaque academic forms and processes. All participants recognized the impact of the initiative not just on student learning, but on the PD impact of the collaborative endeavour itself.

With *Co-producing a Skills-based Programme* Pippa Soccio and Kate Tregloan develop the notion of collaboration for PD even further, outlining how 'Silver Sessional' staff were drawn into the staff PD unit to develop, deliver and reflect on dialogic PD workshops for staff across the Built Environments Faculty. The lessons learned focused not just on the ethical and effective nature of such a collaborative venture, but that as a result sessional staff felt more agentic, included and valued.

In *Bringing Research to Life* Laura Barclay, Sharon Bitter, Anne-Kathrin Reck and Rhiannon Parry Thompson discuss how they used their shared interest in the power of storytelling to generate an intriguing extra-curricular 'research skills' session for students. The initiative approached research differently, harnessing the power of narrative to make research and research outcomes more meaningful for students while shaking up notions of what research can be and how it can be used.

In *Approaching Blended Learning through Teaching Team Collaboration* Katherine Herbert, Julia Lynch and Humayun Murshed reveal the power of a large-scale, multi-site cross-state collaboration to develop a holistic blended learning experience to foster self-directed study in students who typically do not see themselves as active learners. They tease out the complexity of the issues they wanted to address and the power of cross-team working, even when those teams have differing academic and professional capital, and are located on different campuses.

Developing 21st Century Skills through Meaningful Cross-institutional Collaborative International Community Service Projects by Pranit Anand and Byron Tsz Kit Lui outlines a truly inspirational approach to authentic group work in a transnational project. Educators and students from two different universities in two different countries came together to develop solutions for NGOs situated in a third country, demonstrating how creative collaboration between staff teams can create even more creative collaborative experiences for students.

Diana J. Pritchard, Helen Connolly, Amanda Egbe, Mohamed Saeudy, Paul Rowinski, James Bishop, Tamara Ashley and Nicholas Worsfold make a case for *Cross-disciplinary Collaborations for Sustainable Futures, and a Vital and Relevant Academic Community.* In their case study they outline their boundary crossing project where they pooled their interest in ethical education for sustainable futures to bring together multi-disciplinary teams from within and outwith the university to create mass 'learn-in' events to explore contemporary issues through multiple lenses for 'real' social and academic outcomes. Not only did their project break academic isolation, it seeded management buy-in to transform practice for the long term.

Writing Retreats in Social Work: A Disruptive Approach to Facilitating Practice Learning

Kevin Brazant and Dee Tracey

- This case study describes a co-designed writing retreat designed to support students with the synthesis of theory and practice through writing.
- It models decentring power by switching from transmission to a dialogic pedagogy.
- It offers a six-step model to develop metacognition, critical thinking and analysis as part of assessment practices.
- Promoted in the chapter are free writing and peer review to co-create meaning.
- We recommend writing retreats to develop writing and written discourse.

Introduction: Collaborating to Support the Learning of Social Work Students

This chapter presents a case study of a collaboratively designed writing retreat intervention seeking to support critical and creative capacities among Social Work students on a practice learning module. The goal is to develop students as actors with agency within 'the dominant framework of higher education' (Bellinger & Kagawa, 2012). The authors are aware of the wider challenges to UK Social Work education, its constraints, financial and cultural, and the impact on teaching practices in HE (Maclachlan, 2007) where the pressure can be to 'teach to the test' rather than in ways that are liberatory and empowering for the student. To combat some of these points, a joint collaboration was formed between a learning developer (academic mentor) and a qualified Social Work practitioner (subject tutor) with the purpose of supporting the authentic learning and development of Social Work students.

This case study also addresses the dichotomy of teaching for an employment environment of increased regulation and targets based on political imperatives, yet still requires Social Workers to have creativity and problem-solving skills (Jordan & Jordan, 2000). Adopting a dialogic, social constructionist methodology, the authors circumvent didactic, transmissive and monologic teaching approaches (Stewart & McClure, 2013) – reframing learning as dialogic, disruptive, engaging and collaborative, with positive implications for interdisciplinary learning and teaching practice.

Our Contested Context

Social Work programmes across universities are designed in a similar manner, with a blend of academic theoretical learning alongside practical work placements. In academic terms, the first element of learning is classroom based with the primary focus being based upon the learning (the development) of Social Work skills, knowledge, values, theories and methods. This forms the 'grounding' basis for the student's preparation to enter their Social Work practice placements. In designing our project, we thought about 'how' to fully prepare a student for the reality of Social Work practice when the programme is set within an academic HE structure which does not always fit with the realism of the profession, with the university processes at times being limited and not always matching the professional standards and expectations.

Critical Social Work

When considering preparation for the Social Work role, critical reflection and analysis are harnessed for the development of Social Workers, whether qualified or unqualified. This is recognized as of significant importance when linking theory to practice: for qualified Social Workers it is an essential tool for critical decision making (Thompson, 2018). Mantell and Scragg (2018) and other academics recognize the importance of high-quality Social Work education in developing future-qualified Social Work practitioners. Foremost for a profession which is seen as highly charged, reflective practice can help to integrate theoretical learning into practice, giving the student the tools, capacities and platform to be 'ready for practice'.

Social Work England is the regulatory body for Social Work along with another prominent body, the British Association of Social Work (BASW). In the UK, they recognize that

> critical reflection encourages social workers to examine their approach, judgements, decisions and interventions [and acknowledges that] when applying critical reflection, thinking and analysis it helps social workers formulate a treatment plan or intervention for working with a client.
>
> (Social Work England, 2020)

Therefore, it is essential for students to begin to understand and use the process of critical reflection and analysis as early as possible in their careers, recognizing the importance that it holds, especially to ensure unbiased, anti-discrimination, anti-oppression and anti-racist practice (Tedam, 2021). Based on this importance, we designed our project and teaching sessions to prepare students for their placement and to articulate the experiences of their placements in the form of a practice case study assignment, using techniques for critical reflection and dialogue.

What We Did

The role of the educator is to facilitate the learning process by designing sessions that will help students learn and discover, to wrestle with ideas and 'emergent' knowledge. This was the main aim for this project – to not limit the student in their creativity, but to let them explore and find answers, whilst reflecting on their previous life skills and knowledge. A number of theorists and psychologists, such as Bruner, Dewey and Ausubel, held the view that the purpose of education is not to just impart knowledge, but instead to facilitate thinking and problem-solving skills which can then be transferred to a range of situations. With students using their own past experiences and prior knowledge as part of their learning, this approach sits well with the demographics of Social Work students that attend our programme and who come with life skills, prior experience and can relate these experiences to their current learning (Bates, 2019).

As part of active, collaborative learning, 'Dialogic Pedagogy' (Alexander, 2010) shifts the emphasis from the transmission of knowledge by the lecturer to the achievement of learning by the students, through creating conducive learning environments. Our curriculum design approach to these practice learning sessions was to create dialogic instances throughout the writing retreat, using six strategies as follows:

1. Students engaged in a free writing activity upon a case study assignment to stimulate ideas and reflections and to take ownership of their learning. The task was to identify a family or client group with whom they worked and explore the reasons for the choice and how this met the assessment brief.
2. In smaller groups students annotated the assessment criteria, familiarizing themselves with assignment expectations, exploring these with peers and strategizing on how they will meet learning objectives and outcomes.
3. They then produced a draft reflective case study and a subsequent plan to address any gaps in current knowledge.
4. Then they engaged in a peer-sharing exercise of their (draft) case studies harnessing critical thinking by questioning and assessing the work of their peers as a preface to the self-appraisal of their own work.
5. Using a bespoke toolkit of resources and worksheets to assess criticality in their Practice Study, they built on their reflections and were encouraged to share further tips with peers to bolster their learning strategies.
6. Using a writing retreat style activity, they drafted their actual practice study and gained further feedback from their peers through peer appraisal.

Throughout, students were encouraged to collaborate, cooperate and discuss their learning, their processes, their thinking and their draft work. These processes enacted and modelled learning as the collaborative co-construction of knowledge.

Discussion

This approach was cognisant of the interplay of power (Bakhtin, 1999; Stewart & McClure, 2013) disrupting the monologic discourse of traditional forms of teaching. As illustrated above, the learning developer and practice lead planned and scaffolded the retreat but stepped back from intervening in the dialogic solution of problems; instead, activities were constructed to provoke solutions from and between peers. The facilitation of learning was modelled by a flexible and compassionate style by both lecturer and learning development practitioner, creating a conducive learning environment for social learning (Gilbert 2017; Rogers & Freiberg 1994). Given the emancipatory ideas found in Social Work, we sought to frame a discourse in the retreat space that inspired real action in the world as part of student placements, with their overall experiences articulated through their practice case study assignment (Shor & Freire, 1987).

From a constructionist perspective we sought to model an interpretivist epistemology that co-constructs knowledge and took opportunities to mediate understanding of the curriculum and task at hand between novice, able learners and academics (Vygotsky, 1962). Based on the feedback from students they all agreed unanimously that the thing of greatest value to them was to share their placement experiences with their peers and being given the time to think about their chosen clients for the purposes of their practice study assignment as illustrated below:

> I have learned how to use the feedback of my colleagues to think about my practice and to use this constructive criticism to also form part of my own self-analysis and critique.
>
> The small group discussions amongst my peers was very helpful to learn about different approaches to knowledge and to apply this to my practice study.
>
> I had written my practice study but after listening to my peers and lecturers through this workshop I will go back and restructure as I think my work appears more descriptive than critical and I believe this would enhance my grade for this assignment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with a learning developer and discipline academic undertaking this joint venture, we brought together the 'academic' element of the learning and the practical experience of Social Work learning, whilst integrating learning strategies (developing

metacognitive dispositions and study skills) within the collaborative study space. We were able to devise and design a six-step scaffolded framework and use tools to co-teach, meaning that we were able to cooperate to bring a more fulfilling enrichment to the student learning. Our co-delivery used both of the author's skills, disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge sets to enhance student learning.

Group work is often fraught with tensions and conflict between students. However, we believe we created space for a collaborative community of practice to emerge that united the students in their endeavours and obviated the normal tensions of (inauthentic) group work. Given the positive feedback from the project, we believe this presents a cogent case for the further development of scaffolded, cooperative, writing retreats as part of assessment preparation, overtly acknowledging peer appraisal as part of this process. Not only did this develop critical thinking as intended but fostered student learning communities and self-efficacy.

Collaboration for Academic Literacies Development and Enriched Inter-professional Relationships

Quentin Allan, Robyn McWilliams and Sue Raleigh

- This case study outlines a collaborative academic literacies development project in a biological sciences setting.
- The key argument is that such development requires close collaboration between faculty lecturers and learning advisors.
- The project promotes a staged approach to interactive engagement with exemplar texts.
- Collaborations between discipline and literacy staff for student development also provide rich professional development, and writing opportunities.
- A next step would be to work with students as partners in future literacies development projects.

Introduction

In this chapter, we argue that academic literacies' development in a university environment ideally involves close collaboration between faculty lecturers (FLs) who are subject experts in their discipline and learning advisors (LAs) whose expertise in applied linguistics informs their academic writing guidance. This chapter has been co-authored by two LA colleagues and one FL. The subject context in this case is biological sciences with a focus on human anatomy and physiology; the linguistic guidance is informed by the 'genre approach', as outlined by foundational writers in the field of educational linguistics (Martin & Rothery, 1993; Swales, 1990). This

approach is characterized by a focus on helping students identify salient features of different assignment types. In practical terms, this involves careful deconstruction of exemplar texts that have been produced by students in authentic assessments (Rose & Martin, 2012). Through observation of student writing, and recent interactions with faculty lecturers, the LAs have been inspired to move beyond a 'best-practice model' of embedding academic literacies development as outlined in McWilliams and Allan (2014), to something more collaborative: working together to tackle student study, learning and communication issues. One important way in which we have extended the original model is through the use of exemplar texts as the point of departure, specifically the genre short answer questions. We were interested in exploring the effectiveness of co-developing teaching materials derived from a careful deconstruction of exemplars.

This case study starts by identifying two key themes from the literature: institutional awareness and use of exemplar texts. It moves on to summarize the experiences of an FL who requested LA support and how this developed into a partnership for learning. Next is a discussion of FL awareness of embedding academic literacy practices followed by an examination of the importance of student exemplar texts. The case study concludes with a consideration of how the collaboration has enhanced student learning, followed by recommendations.

Lecturer Awareness Relating to the Value of Embedding Academic Literacy

Collaborative, embedded literacy practices have become more widespread across faculties and disciplinary programmes in recent years (Devereux et al., 2018). To reflect these developments, a number of useful models or frameworks of embedded practice approaches have been developed (e.g. McWilliams & Allan, 2014; Charlton & Martin, 2018; Maldoni, 2018). This focus on discipline-specific practices has raised lecturers' awareness of the linguistic features and rhetorical conventions of particular assessment types (Purser, 2011) and the value of student exemplars in illuminating them (Wingate, 2018). The value here resides in lecturers' ability to draw students' attention to salient textual patterns that are associated with the assignment type and the 'work' that those features accomplish in the text. In a teaching environment, whether online or in a classroom, it is also possible to generate productive discussions with students about learning in general, and academic writing in particular – including the possibilities of writing to learn, as distinct from learning to write (Abegglen et al., 2021).

Importance of Student Exemplar Texts

The use of student exemplar texts has become central to developing effective literacy materials to support students when completing assessments (Dixon et al., 2020; Hawe et al., 2021). Whilst some research suggests that the use of exemplars can be

overwhelming for some students (Hendry et al., 2011), the dominant view is that their use is beneficial for improving the quality of student writing. In terms of motivation, providing students with tools to examine their own writing enhances self-efficacy and self-regulation (Hawe et al., 2021). These tools are complemented by lecturer feedback on formative assessments which includes comparisons between exemplar texts and students' own writing (Carless & Boud, 2018).

The Collaboration between Learning Advisors and Faculty Lecturers

In a busy university setting, many interactions between staff members end up being merely transactional and non-dialogic; in contrast, in this case, the interaction between LAs and FL is characterized by a richly dynamic and ongoing relationship that has at its heart student success and retention. From the FL's perspective, one of the primary objectives is to scaffold students in their understanding of the complexities of biological science. This starts with the classroom content and is linked to real-life examples with an awareness of the relevance to future practice in their respective health fields. The focus then tends to be on subject content rather than writing. However, students can experience difficulties with writing about this type of subject and showcasing their learning through writing. These difficulties include concise paraphrasing of complex physiological processes, using appropriate terminology but also familiarizing themselves with subject-specific genres.

The collaboration in this case emerged from a request by the FL for multiple individual student consultations. This request was not feasible given the LA team's limited staff resources and the large student cohort (Semester two, 2019, n = 572; Semester two, 2020, n = 676). For the assessment tasks in this paper, a number of writing challenges were presented (distinctive structure, purpose and language features) for which there had not been any previous tailored support.

The collaboration here was initiated by the FL with respect to helping students' structure responses to short answer questions. The LAs consulted firstly with students who had been identified as needing support, then with the FLs to understand from the teachers' perspective the sort of problems students were encountering. The next step was to jointly develop a series of academic writing workshops to address the unique writing challenges of this assessment. The objective was to develop sustainable resources for a large cohort that could be transferred from one semester to the next, indefinitely. A key aspect of the LA approach is the use and systematic analysis of authentic exemplar texts to highlight and scaffold the learning required. An exciting development has been the integration of emerging technologies to create text animation to emphasize salient features of exemplars.

The close partnership between the FLs and the LA enabled the coming together of different epistemological approaches and practices, developing mutual understanding and cooperation for the benefit of increased student engagement with their learning.

The teaching and learning materials and classroom activities emerged from this ongoing dialogue:

- Firstly, students were asked to identify key words in a sample question.
- Then students' attention was drawn to linguistic exponents for particular language functions, e.g. language for describing anatomical structures, and language for explaining physiological processes and neurological pathways.
- Students were then shown an exemplar text which had been deconstructed and annotated to highlight key textual features.
- Finally, students were provided with opportunities to practise writing – with formative feedback.

How Did This Collaboration Enhance Student Learning?

The impact on student learning is encouraging. Informal feedback from students who attended targeted writing workshops indicates that they are aware of developing a more nuanced understanding of academic writing, via the explicit pedagogical focus on text structure, purpose and language choices – and especially through opportunities to discuss aspects of their writing with classmates, ALs and FLs.

Furthermore, FL feedback suggests that the embedded literacies focus has resulted in students achieving higher grades; results compared with the previous year indicate improved pass rates from 64 per cent in 2019 to 85 per cent in 2020.

Further, the coming together of FLs and LA in this project produced a cache of annotated, animated exemplars that the students themselves could return to as part of their self-directed learning. A conscious decision was made to provide unlimited access to this growing suite of self-access videos for the duration of their degree, fostering continuous learning support and exchange about writing.

Conclusions

For us, collaboration has enhanced professional development and enriched inter-professional relationships. The FL noticed a heightened sense of linguistic awareness and a greater confidence to talk about text in practical ways with students. Of particular value was the developmental, ongoing and organic collaborative process as the materials were generated, trialled, critiqued and re-worked.

Staff collaborations such as this are designed to enhance teaching and learning. The value of such collaborations is well attested in the literature (McWilliams & Allan, 2014) and our approach was informed by solid pedagogic principles, including the developmental use of exemplar texts. This approach takes the guesswork out of managing the writing demands of a content-rich paper. From an LA perspective, the objective was to establish an approach that is effective and enduring. Sustainable academic literacies support is enhanced with good relationships enhanced by multi-modal approaches. Certainly, when FL and LA work together, we have observed positive change in students' performance over time.

Indeed, feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive; however, in terms of materials development, the student voice has been somewhat backgrounded. In future, it would be desirable to better integrate students as partners, including in post-course feedback development, exploring how students had used the resources and how they had helped in the understanding and ability to articulate their new learning.

The focus of this case study has been on the growing relationship between FL and LA colleagues. With students' development at the heart, such collaborations unfold over time and, in retrospect, can be seen to exhibit a number of dynamic dimensions, including catalysing reflection and promoting creative approaches to student support and writing. Such relationships at their best are dynamic, meetings ongoing, even when the initiating objective has been met.

Reflecting on this case study has inspired us to rework the original model (McWilliams & Allan, 2014) with the student exemplar text occupying a more central role in the collaborative process. Even more so, it has inspired us to continue our partnership and work closely, LA with FL, to develop students' academic literacies. This is co-learning and co-teaching in action.

Co-producing a Skills-based Programme: Peer-to-peer Learning Partnerships in Professional Development

Philippa Soccio and Kate Tregloan

- Sessional staff make a valuable and significant contribution to built environment education, and enrich their teaching with research and industry experience.
- Support for the PD of this high-turnover casual workforce is a complex challenge, raising pragmatic as well as ethical issues.
- Collaborative peer-to-peer learning partnerships were trialled through this project to support PD of this group.
- Findings from the project identify key factors for effective support of sessional staff, such as recognition of personal value, inclusion and agency, and the enduring impact of social learning approaches.

Introduction

Sessional (adjunct, casual, part-time) staff account for more than 60 per cent of the teaching workforce in Australian Schools of Architecture (Maroya et al., 2019). These staff typically come from professional practice or are graduates undertaking Research Higher Degree study. Despite the significant impact they will have on student learning, most sessional teachers have little or no formal training in pedagogy (Sutherland, 2002). The following case study describes a collaborative developmental project by

a teaching and learning group at a large comprehensive Australian university. The project supported selected experienced sessional staff to co-produce a skills-based PD programme suitable for their less experienced colleagues, but relevant to all teaching staff.

Context

The Built Environment Learning and Teaching (BEL+T) group was established in 2018 at the University of Melbourne, located in Melbourne, Australia. The group works with staff and students of the Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning (ABP) to improve teaching and learning, developing and sharing resources through the BEL+T website at https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/belt. A targeted discipline-specific PD approach is central to the support of the 400 new and returning sessional staff who are hired each semester in ABP programmes. Together, sessional and tenured teachers work with 3,500 students studying Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Urban Planning, Construction Management, Urban and Cultural Heritage, and Property.

The BEL+T group delivers PD for all staff to improve teaching quality and student engagement through ongoing development of built environment pedagogy. This PD draws on creative problem-solving and design-led approaches, evidence-based research methodologies, and project-focused consultancy. In addition to induction programmes for new staff, 'BEL+T Sessions' typically focus on current issues each year and have included Teaching for Inclusive Learning; Collaboration vs Collusion; Moving Online; and Using the Microstudio to date.

Sessional Staff Engagement (SSE) has been identified as a priority within ABP's Strategic plan, and an SSE Survey was developed by BEL+T to inform this work. Since 2020 the SSE Survey has shifted its focus to understanding bigger challenges through longitudinal data, such as the changed experiences of sessional staff during the Covid-driven shift to online teaching, and a deeper understanding of teaching practice support needs. One opportunity identified was tailoring in-semester PD for sessional staff: a challenge widely recognized in the literature (see Hitch et al., 2018, for a review of thirty-seven related papers published since 2006). The SSF Framework (funded through the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching) defines provision of 'a structured, systematic and accessible professional development programme' as a priority for supporting sessional staff (Harvey, 2013, 2). Our vision was for dialogic PD to take place through collaborative projects, and this case study outlines that.

Aim

Results from the SSE survey suggested enthusiasm for PD opportunities in which staff could engage directly with their sessional peers. In contrast to the formats for previous BEL+T Sessions, such as roundtable discussions or focused workshops,

this project aimed to celebrate, support and enrich the expertise of sessional teachers through the collaborative design of a dialogic PD programme. BEL+T staff worked with experienced sessional staff to co-design the programme, aiming to encourage a sense of ownership of the initiative, including the freedom to revise sections of the course design based on their lived experience. Review of the programme, with institutional Human Research Ethics Committee approval, investigated What Works?: Peer-to-peer Learning (P2P) Partnerships Informing Staff PD.

How We Approached the Collaboration

P2P partnerships are 'voluntary, reciprocal helping relationships between individuals of comparable status' (Eisen, 2000, 5). While mentoring and coaching are typically one-on-one directive relationships (Parker, et al., 2008), P2P partnerships are themselves a collaboration. Discussion and interaction between participants 'favour the construction of knowledge and help to develop reflective skills and a sense of "togetherness"' (Guldberg, 2008, 46) and draw upon the qualities of social learning spaces such as 'knowing as practice' and 'knowing as identity' (Wenger, 2011, 195) that form part of Communities of Practice for learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991),

As 'discussion' forms the basis of P2P partnerships, experienced sessional staff were recruited early. BEL+T shortlisted experienced sessional candidates to submit expressions of interest. Four staff with twenty combined years of sessional teaching experience were selected, collectively named 'Silver Sessionals', and paid to contribute to four planning and review meetings and to the three conversation events. The *ABP Teaching Tricks and Tips* events programme included: Starting the Semester Right by establishing good staff-student relationships; Giving Students Quality Feedback/ Feedforward and Assessment; and Ending the Semester Well through teaching reflection. The programme and the expertise of the Silver Sessionals were promoted through the BEL+T News and Opportunity webpages, Faculty weekly newsletter and the sessional teaching community site on the LMS.

A series of planning meetings underpinned the collaborations. In the first of these, BEL+T presented a loose framework for the programme – this was refined by the Silver Sessionals according to their reflections on their own lived experience. Subsequent meetings explored topics for each event, and drew on BEL+T analysis of SSE survey responses. Silver Sessionals shared related experiences, explored each other's strategies and speculated about alternatives. Key challenges were identified as prompts for each event. Figure 3.1 presents an example – this and other session prompts can be found via https://figshare.com/s/f28b09805ee54ed417c6. Planning meetings also offered time for debriefing of previous events: Would we have changed anything? What did we learn? During these hour-long discussions, the group also planned a structure for the following event. BEL+T confirmed event plans by email with a running sheet highlighting key ideas and strategies.

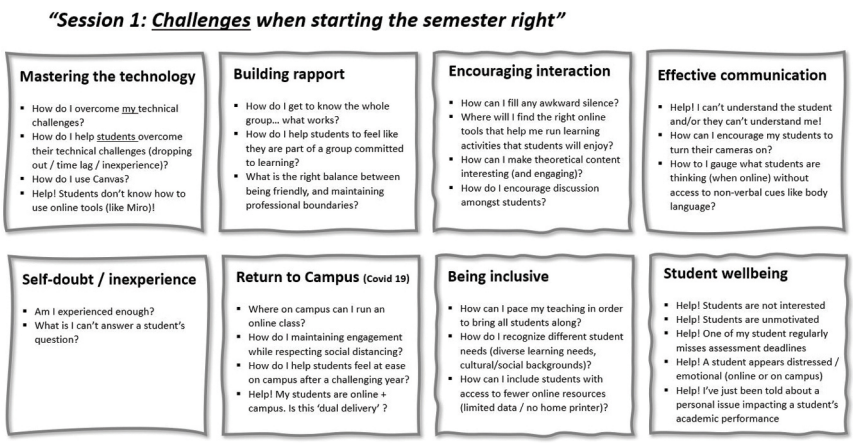

Figure 3.1 Session 1 – Challenges at semester start (Soccio & Tregloan, 2022).

The PD Events in Action

In all three events, the Silver Sessionals led the discussion facilitated by BEL+T. Half of each event was dedicated to Q&A between Silver Sessionals and attendees. The high levels of interaction were encouraging as all events were held online due to Covid-19 restrictions. The number of participants varied across each event with the highest attendance (nineteen people) at Session 1. Events were recorded for review, and BEL+T summarized key takeaways, confirming these with the group before publication to a Faculty Teaching LMS site. Site analytics indicate that this LMS page of resources was viewed sixty-eight times over the semester. An end-of-project survey distributed via the LMS found that participants valued the initiative, but struggled to attend due to conflicting time commitments. BEL+T has speculated that payment of participants may have improved attendance further.

At the conclusion of the project, an additional debrief meeting with Silver Sessionals provided a focused opportunity to comment on the approach taken across the programme and inform the evaluation of the project. The group consented to recording discussions for the purposes of research and publication; these were transcribed verbatim. BEL+T researchers analysed the data to identify emergent themes in relation to the focus questions:

1. What was attractive about this ABP Teaching Tips and Tricks opportunity?
2. How would you describe your role in the sessions?
3. Did you feel as though you were part of a collaboration?
   a. (If yes) What specific actions helped you to feel you were part of a collaboration?
4. What did you gain from your involvement in Teaching Tips and Tricks?
5. Were there any surprises?

How the Participants Experienced Collaboration

While feedback about the project was very positive, it also highlighted that sessional staff are rarely included as collaborators in teaching and learning discussions, despite their unique perspectives and experiences with students (AUTC, 2003). Participants made it clear that they felt included in the project, and that this was unusual. As an example,

> absolutely, and very much that, when you do ask a question, you are really genuinely listening to the answers, and taking that on board. There are so many instances outside of this space where that isn't the case. So it's really, really lovely to be … I keep using the word 'embraced' by the community here, and to feel very much part of it in this space.

While the structure for each event was flexible and the conversations quite organic, the value of the planning meetings was highlighted as supporting a sense of agency:

> I think the planning sessions … (were) really instrumental in helping us develop a sense that we're a community putting this together rather than BEL+T just telling us what we should be answering … You had a broad idea of what could happen, but you were also entirely open to the conversation flowing and seeing how that might mean that the direction of a particular session was moulded in a different way.

One participant described a perception that there were a series of 'invisible collaborators' who were also contributing:

> The word 'conduit' came to mind for some reason, and I think we're all kind of standing here and we're not just a product of our own. We have all these wonderful life experiences, wonderful teachers who might not necessarily be tutors and yet somehow they influenced us in a way … in many ways, we don't stand alone in isolation. Everyone (is) together.

The discussion also highlighted how P2P partnership can foster bi-directional learning through joint reflection (Eisen, 2000):

> It's been really valuable listening to other people's teaching ideas and experiences and thinking about ways to adopt them …. Learning and teaching, it's very much a two-way thing … Or six ways in this case [pointing to four Silver Sessionals and two BEL+T members].

Individual learning was also described:

> Finding a way to articulate what we are doing has been great. Because I think all of us are instinctively, intuitively teaching and doing things, and reinventing

> ourselves every single day, and these sessions helped us to learn some language around what we're doing. … Just finding more ways to articulate these things has been really really valuable.

Small actions that made these participants feel important and valued were also highlighted, reinforcing a commitment to the collaborative process. When asked about what attracted them to the opportunity, one participant remembered the recruitment invitation: 'You had me at the email title. It says, "BEL+T chooses you". It's like, of course, yes … I'll say "Yes!"'

Conclusion

The Teaching Tips and Tricks and PD project is an example of a P2P partnership focused on co-design of learning experiences for others – in this case for sessional colleagues – but has also highlighted to BEL+T the crucial value of such collaborative partnerships, and the opportunities these offer to members of an inclusive HE landscape. There are ambitions to extend the programme in future semesters, and to highlight the rich experiences of sessional colleagues, by involving them in collaborative PD responses to more subject-specific teaching challenges.

Review of the design and delivery of the ABP Teaching Tips and Tricks pilot has identified some key contributing factors we need to maintain for successful collaborative partnerships with sessional colleagues: ensuring a sense of being valued; supporting inclusion; and recognizing personal agency. It is sobering to acknowledge that these describe atypical experiences for sessional teachers. The central importance of collaboration to learning in HE emerged through participants' reflections, and the development of shared languages, nuance and understandings. The recognition of 'invisible collaborators' – the previous teachers and mentors who contributed to this work through their influence – highlights the enduring impact of social learning and the lessons that can be passed on to others through quality collaboration for PD and learning.

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Bringing Research to Life: Enhancing Research Skills through Collaborative Storytelling

Laura Barclay, Sharon Bittner, Anne-Kathrin Reck and Rhiannon Parry Thompson

- Storytelling as a shared interest and used as a catalyst for this collaborative project.
- We used storytelling to foster students' development of research skills by uncovering local stories to create narratives.
- Storytelling offers a place where students and staff can come together to deepen team working via a creative, non-assessed task.
- For us it enhanced staff understanding of different support roles within the institution.
- It raised student awareness of local historical personalities and the University's place and context – providing students with a deeper sense of belonging.

Prologue

Collaborations are beneficial to all participants, from designers of an activity to the peer groups that participate (Crookendale, 2020; Fox et al., 2011; Montgomery & Miller, 2011). In September 2019, three Learning Developers at the University of Portsmouth hosted a staff-facing symposium on 'Storytelling in Learning Development' to members of the wider Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) community. This event arose from a shared interest in using storytelling in professional practice. Inspired by the symposium, the Learning Developers collaborated with an Assistant Faculty Librarian to create the student-facing *Bringing Research to Life* workshop. This is an extra-curricular, non-assessed, research skills workshop designed to demystify the research process and encourage student engagement with non-traditional materials and digital historical resources. Students were invited to find evidence to create short, personal narratives of historical figures with connections to the local area.

Our work was grounded in our belief that storytelling is a powerful tool for generating and exploring questions, accessing different kinds of knowledge and helping us to understand the world and our place within it. As Tahir Shah (2008, 152), in *Arabian nights: A Caravan of Moroccan Dreams*, so astutely observed, 'stories are a communal currency of humanity'. Furthermore, the use of storytelling 'frees' the student from the conventions of academic writing, but still encourages research skills, logic, criticality and simply writing. Since our students had not been instructed in storytelling for academic purposes per se, we applied the simple 4 P principle. The stories constructed revolved around historical personalities (=people) with a connection to Portsmouth (=place), were evolved according to what students found in their research (=plot) and served our overall goal (=purpose) of enhancing the participants' engagement, sense of belonging, critical and creative skills in a third space setting for learning development.

This case study highlights the benefits of collaborative working with colleagues to improve student outcomes. For us it contributed to staff understanding of different support roles within the institution, as well as offering a place where students could come together to deepen knowledge of research and team working within a creative, non-assessed task.

Once upon a Time …

Whilst our work practices differ owing to the requirements of our respective cohorts, the process of co-planning, co-implementing and co-evaluating this workshop has allowed us to find synergy in our approaches to facilitating student learning (Montiel-Overall, 2005). With our personal relationships already established through previous collaborative work, we felt that we could work together effectively (Pham, 2019) and explore new ways to address issues that we had noticed in relation to students' approaches to academic writing and use of sources in their academic work.

In early planning meetings, we distributed the workload to allow each person to contribute to an integral part of the workshop, whilst ensuring that work was not duplicated. The content and structure of the workshop were then devised and delivered as a whole group.

From Ivy to Helen & John

The premise of the workshop was inspired by an imaginative narrative about the life of Ivy Williams, written by Professor Matthew Weait, former Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Portsmouth. Set at the end of her life, *Imagining Ivy Williams* (Weait, n.d.) presents Ivy reflecting on her life and reminiscing about her numerous achievements. The details woven into Weait's narrative were gathered from sources including photographs, personal correspondence and official documents such as Ivy's last Will and Testament, and referenced via footnotes throughout. At the start of *Bringing Research to Life*, students were given a page from *Imagining Ivy Williams* and asked to comment on what could be learnt about Ivy, and to identify the source of the information. This presented students with an example of the type of personal narrative that we aimed to create later in the session.

In the workshop, students were given the choice of researching one of six people, each of whom had a connection to Portsmouth or the wider local area and chosen also for the potential links to students' academic subject areas:

- Nancy Astor – the first woman in the UK to take her seat in the House of Commons
- Arthur Conan Doyle – goalkeeper for Portsmouth Association Football Club
- Helen Duncan – last person to be imprisoned under the Witchcraft Act 1735
- Katharine Furse – director of the Women's Royal Naval Service
- John Jea – believed to have founded the first Black majority church in the UK
- John Pounds – inspired the creation of Ragged schools

In addition to helping students develop their research and teamwork skills, this activity would provide students with the opportunity to learn about the local area so as to enhance their sense of belonging within the civic and academic community.

We sited the workshop in the library, the heart of the University community, to entice students to use non-traditional materials and digital historical resources for their research. To facilitate the research phase of the workshop, we produced a resource pack in order to give students a starting point for their explorations. The range of sources suggested was based upon the librarian's professional experience and included primary source and newspaper archives, art, architecture and photographic resources, statistics, maps, government documents, legal resources, and paper book stock. The pack was made accessible to attendees via a shared Google document, with clickable links to the online resources.

The Workshop: Inter-disciplinary and Collaborative

Students from our respective faculties were invited to participate in the workshop and could undertake the research portion of the session individually, in pairs or in small groups. Then, for the storytelling element, groups were combined based on the characters chosen. This led to inter-disciplinary groups working towards a shared goal of creating a narrative through weaving together disparate pieces of information found by the group members. Group work allowed students to see how they had approached the task from different angles and gave them the opportunity to develop essential team working and communication skills (Carruthers, 2021).

During the students' discussions, we each worked with a group to help students find ways to incorporate the diverse information into a coherent creative text. For example, a student who researched Helen Duncan discovered where she lived and conducted her seances, and used the library's Special Collections Map Library to find a map of this area during the time that Helen occupied the property. The map revealed that a school was in the same area, which was then incorporated into a narrative where Helen could hear the school children playing in the playground whilst she was preparing for a seance.

The narratives that students created were presented to the rest of the group, creating a sort of feedback loop of exchange. The stories presented ranged from bullet-pointed lists and spider diagrams, to full prose. In each case, we encouraged students to include appropriate references and to explain the range of sources that had been generated by their research and harnessed in their creative stories.

And in the End …

In hindsight, it is apparent that clearer direction during the story creation phase would be helpful. At first, students tended to report information rather than create a narrative that included details. Therefore, in future it could be helpful to suggest a specific moment in the subject's life as a starting point and provide students with a narrative structure.

However, we successfully managed to apply the 4 Ps to our workshop setting. The historical personalities formed the initial hook, created interest and were linked to our locality, Portsmouth. The participants found out key information and put together a creative plot that they presented. Overall, the workshop served a strong purpose of bringing students together in a powerful place to enhance their research skills and introduce them to a plethora of resources valuable for their future academic work. It also brought us, as a team, closer together.

Epilogue

Our collaboration not only brought together colleagues from different faculties but also utilized the knowledge base of our academic librarians. Creating this workshop has broadened the practitioners' knowledge base by working with colleagues and across areas of the institution that were previously unfamiliar. Through participating in this project, we have developed a clearer understanding of each other's role in supporting students, as well as forming new and closer working relationships, which places us in a good position to identify and pursue further inter-faculty collaboration opportunities.

We believe that the key to a successful collaboration is to work with colleagues who share a common interest. Our commitment to using storytelling in our work will continue, with the development of a workshop where students will use items from the Library's Special Collections to reflect on their experience as members of their academic and civic communities. It is hoped that this will help students to cultivate a sense of belonging to both these communities. We are looking forward to the next chapter of using storytelling in our diverse roles to strengthen the support of student learning.

Approaching Blended Learning through Teaching Team Collaboration: Lessons from an AU Postgraduate Accounting Programme

Katherine Herbert, Julia Lynch and Humayun Murshed

- This study showcases the importance of a collaborative approach within teaching teams to successfully engage with both domestic and international students to create a holistic learning experience for all.
- The subject teaching teams, like any team-based collaborative group, are a prime example of the challenges of balancing cohesion of ideas and experiences based on the varying levels of teaching and industry experiences within the team.
- The teaching approach taken and the integration of the learning resources developed helped build blended learning experiences that fostered self-directed learning.

Introduction

The focus of this case study is the intentional collaborative practices in teams teaching across multiple locations, in blended mode and with a largely international cohort (Ali et al., 2015; Heng, 2019; Huang & Turner, 2018; McKenzie et al., 2020). This study is an example of how this context is being addressed in a postgraduate programme at an AU university.

Our investigation looked closely at subject teaching teams whose team members teach in multiple locations, working together in terms of subject knowledge and classroom delivery. The questions addressed were:

1. What insights can be drawn from the collaborative nature of the teaching teams to better understand the community of learning practice that exists in the international on-campus cohorts?
2. How can these insights inform the blended learning design that includes spaces and opportunities to ease international students into their new learning context?

The Programme

Developed to satisfy the academic requirements of the professional accounting bodies in AU and NZ, the Masters of Professional Accounting (MPA) is an accredited programme that allows students to transition into the profession from either a non-accounting undergraduate qualification or an overseas accounting degree not recognized in AU or NZ. As such, international students were primarily enrolled into this programme. At our university, the programmes are run across seven campuses spread across three states. The subjects consist of fundamental accounting principles, compliance and regulatory knowledge, as well as industry-specific skills. These subjects are delivered both online and on campus, with subject materials designed to cater to both modes of delivery. All subject materials are provided through the university's LMS, Blackboard.

In 2018, the internal course review identified areas of the programme needing improvements focused on the need to deliver subject content that optimized development of subject knowledge and skills. It also sought to enhance learning experiences by motivating on-campus students to effectively and efficiently use both online and classroom spaces. Furthermore, it was necessary to address students whose first language was not English, to create inclusive learning that eases international students' transition into a new learning environment and satisfies the accreditation requirements for the profession. Therefore, the teams teaching the programme collaborated to design successful blended learning experiences across the subjects that made up the programme.

The Subject Teaching Teams

The programme consists of twelve subjects and therefore twelve subject teaching teams were involved in designing and delivering the learning. Each team in this programme was made up of two to five members drawn from academics from multiple campuses.

In our institution, there is a minimum expectation of engagement and communication within subject teaching teams. The lead teaching academic, the Subject Convenor (SC), coordinates the teams, the learning activities, resources and topics to be covered in the subject. Sessional staff are then brought in based on location and number of students. While the make-up of the subject teaching teams appears transitory, the reality is many of the sessional teaching staff have taught at the university for quite some time and have an established working relationship with each other.

The decision was made that the challenges faced by the students enrolled in this programme would benefit from a disruption of this hierarchical pyramid, to draw on the voices and expertise of the many experienced practitioners involved. Whereas previously, the SC would take a lead role, here they were encouraged to become more of a facilitator, initiating discussion and conversation – bringing teams together to discuss the overall programme and subject design. A more collaborative work ethic and practice developed through which authentic steps towards implementing the design would be intentional and cooperative. A more holistic picture of the strengths and needs of the students emerged alongside the surfacing of opportunities for effective blended learning.

Team members are made up of transnational academics with various teaching and industry experiences in AU and overseas. In most cases, the academics who teach in the programme are graduates from the programme itself; have come from non-English speaking backgrounds; and have worked in accounting and finance in AU and overseas. The diverse make-up of the subject teaching teams afforded us the opportunities to utilize multiple perspectives, particularly from those, in the city-based campuses, who teach international students on campus.

The Learners

Students enrolled in this programme predominantly came from Asian countries with English as a second language. English as the teaching language was not the only hurdle in transitioning into an AU university and PG programme where the terminology used for the accounting profession in AU and NZ varied significantly to those used in the students' home countries. Students from this demographic typically prefer to have structured guidance and instructor-led information that feeds into assessments, and may need further encouragement to engage in self-directed learning. At the same time, all students need additional motivation – an understanding of 'what's-in-it-for-me' – to engage actively with subject content and resources, online and in class (Heng, 2019). This often poses challenges in motivating students to apply the principles of critical thinking and self-directed learning in their learning process. It was important that the subject design addressed this.

Therefore, two key challenges faced the teaching teams in this programme. The first one was to enable international students to transition into the AU university context due to the language barrier and a sense of not belonging (Ali et al., 2015; Huang & Turner, 2018). Second, there was evidence that students were not actively engaging with subject materials and self-directed learning activities unless directly covered in the synchronous classroom arena online or on campus. This phenomenon has been found in other universities across the globe especially where students are accustomed

to coming to class and expect an expert to stand in front of the classroom delivering information (Heng, 2019).

To address these issues, the teaching teams developed a blended learning project.

The Blended Learning Project

Blended learning generally refers to the delivery of learning through a combination of online and face-to-face (Castro, 2019) teaching and materials. Furthermore, blended learning has come to encompass high-impact quality learning and teaching practices through intentional design of learning experiences (McKenzie et al., 2020; Prion & Mitchell, 2018). A three-phase strategy was developed under the Blended Learning Project to harness the multiple perspectives of the subject teaching teams to enhance student learning and engagement. The project aimed to capture in three phases:

1. insights from the subject teaching teams to understand the community of learning practice that exists among on campus students;
2. strategically designed online resources and tools that will remove on-campus (both domestic and international) students' resistance to completing self-directed learning activities; and
3. opportunities for international students to ease into and transition successfully into the AU HE context.

The Collaborative Teaching Model

Teaching in HE provides many opportunities for collaboration (Walsh & Kahn, 2009). In our case, we acknowledged that a more collaborative teaching model and a more direct collaboration within the teaching teams were important and therefore co-working and co-creation would be intentionally built into this project.

The key to seeing any success in Phase One of the project was to harness the experiences and knowledge of the members of the subject teaching teams who already had a process of reflecting on and discussing preparations for their subjects' next delivery. We decided to build on this process. As part of the course review tasks and actions, we organized focus group discussions on each campus, acknowledging that expertise and experience reside implicitly within individuals (Walsh & Kahn, 2009). These spaces were our opportunity to capture the expertise and experiences explicitly by gathering all teaching team members to discuss the course review outcomes and expected actions. Each member was asked to share their experiences, and report on strategies that worked and did not work. The responses collated provided us with key themes and points about subject delivery feedback, as well as online resources design and use in multiple delivery modes. The result of this was the development of a whole programme approach which focused on strategic use of online resources and tools that complemented on-campus, synchronous classes.

In Phase Two of the project, the subjects first encountered by all students in their first year on the programme would incorporate more fundamental learning experiences,

while the succeeding subjects would then build students confidence with self-directed learning and application of skills through workshop-type learning activities. The first four subjects studied incorporated induction activities, such as the exploration of the Blackboard space, signposted as activities to engage with before on-campus or online meetings would occur. To encourage participation, students were provided with online access to their textbooks for free. It was revealed during the focus group discussion that many international students would not purchase the textbook due to cost. User analytics for eBook access showed that this intervention led to high numbers of downloads, with students showing evidence of engaging with readings prior to coming to class.

In Phase Three of the project, learning activities were deliberately designed to explicitly guide students' learning in-class and online. Each resource and learning activity were embedded in each subject based on the characteristic of the content and the context of our learners, so that students had a purpose for engaging with the resource. It was explicitly explained to students that resources provided could be accessed at any time, and multiple times which sought to encourage them to learn outside the scheduled classes. This enabled a blended learning experience where online and face-to-face content were integrated and complemented each other.

Outcomes

While we accepted that the students might have been expecting to have an expert 'talk at them', we needed the subject teaching teams to reinforce the students' role in their own learning. We achieved this by removing unambiguous content, clear signposting and directions with respect to readings, resources and activities which needed to be engaged with before the next class (Prion & Mitchell, 2018). This was reinforced by teaching team members through online discussion boards and announcements.

In the synchronous classes, whether in online meetings or on-campus classes, workshop activities were actively promoted and integrated. Students would work together on problems based on their readings and asynchronous activities. These would then be discussed with the 'expert' to satisfy those students that wished for more teacher-led input. Thereby, we did not completely remove the expectation that the teaching academic is the expert, but we provided opportunities for students unfamiliar with this more dialogic type of learning to see how they can build their self-directed learning skills. Taking a more collaborative teaching approach and with a renewed focus on the blended learning experience with a consistent message across the programme enabled students together to take advantage of self-directed learning.

Conclusion

Many students fail to see 'the point' of self-directed learning, due to various educational and cultural experiences and expectations. Studies in the UK (Huang & Turner, 2018) and in the United States (Heng, 2019) point particularly to the cultural context of learning for students who come from more transmissive systems as the main reason international

students find it challenging to transition into Western or English universities. We chose to address these interlinked challenges collaboratively and creatively.

The subject teaching teams, like any team-based collaborative group, are a prime example of the challenges of balancing cohesion of ideas and experiences based on the varying levels of teaching and industry experiences within the team. This balancing act is essential to achieving a unified and fulfilled teaching team, creating a coherent and purposive learning experience for students who can equitably engage with the learning activities on offer (Minett-Smith & Davis, 2020). In our case, the coming together of the different teams and joint approach to redesign the programme led to a more integrated learning experience for students.

Recommendations for Practice

This case study showcases the power of collaborating to design a blended learning model which encouraged students, who perhaps do not position themselves as agents in their own learning, to engage in self-directed learning as part of a holistic curriculum designed to aid transition into and through a professional course and a Western university. Our unified approach encouraged students to see the purpose of those blended activities and thus also facilitated a change in mindset, so that students started to see the teaching academic move from 'expert' to 'facilitator'. Future work in this area would be in moving towards students becoming active partners in, and co-constructors of, their learning, building on the opportunities to collaborate with the facilitator-teaching academics.

Developing Twenty-first-century Skills through Meaningful Cross-institutional Collaborative International Community Service Projects

Pranit Anand and Byron Tsz Kit Lui

- This case study shares a collaborative learning activity that was developed between two institutions in AU and HK.
- The group work involved students from AU and HK working together on social projects for NGOs located in a third country.
- The case study highlights challenges and makes suggestions for other educators interested in developing similar initiatives such as addressing the differences that exist between educators, students and institutions across social, cultural, linguistic and geographic boundaries.
- Based on our experience and research, we suggest identifying collaborative institutional partners with similar intent, and being flexible to accommodate differences in timelines, expectations, assessment protocols and compliance requirements.

Background and Context

Collaboration, teamwork and intercultural competencies are widely accepted as important twenty-first-century transformative skills (Martin, 2018; OECD, 2018) and group work is acknowledged as an important part of HE pedagogy. However, designing group work activities in HE that engage and motivate can be challenging. Common challenges identified by both students and educators around group work involve 'free-riding', unequal allocation of workloads, lack of leadership and dominating group members (Davies, 2009; Jaques, 2007; Robinson, 2013). Group work activities become even more complicated when the classes include diverse cultural groups with significant differences in expectations, familiarity with language and other academic conventions and influences (Davies, 2009). These challenges are compounded even further when group work involves assessment. These differences can lead to unwanted consequences such as resistance and non-cooperation to withdrawing from HE altogether.

However, the issue is not just that students resist group work and group assignments. Assessment processes in HE tend to be very 'dualistic' (Crawford et al., 2020), that is, they tend to favour certain rational, individualistic and disembodied ways of thinking that in themselves mitigate against peer-to-peer learning. Universities typically have very strict policies and procedures around assessments, often as a requirement from external accreditation bodies (Dawson, et al., 2013), leaving little room for innovations particularly around cross-institutional collaborative assessments. Furthermore, most assessments tend to focus on very specific learning outcomes with little emphasis on developing the whole student within a globalized workplace (Clifford & Montgomery, 2017). Consequently, many university students do not get the opportunity that group work can provide to engage with diverse ideas and challenges, and ways of solving these challenges through intercultural interactions.

This case study presents the outcomes of a cross-institutional collaborative international community service project that aimed to help students gain real-world experience working with social service organizations and appreciate the challenges of working across social, cultural, linguistic and geographically dispersed groups.

Cross-institutional Collaborative Learning Activity

A collaborative 'assessment for learning' activity was developed between UOW College AU and the Community College of the City University of HK (now UOW College HK). Students from each of the institutions, located in AU and HK, respectively, were brought together to form transnational groups tasked to work together to identify, develop and deploy a social media solution (e.g. increase audience participation) for an NGO located in a third country. The separate geographical locations of the group members and the NGO that they worked for, as well as the

task of working with a 'real' organization, provided students with a challenging yet authentic learning experience as they had to negotiate various spatial, technological, cultural, communicative, creative and linguistic challenges while developing a real-life solution for a real 'client'.

The students collaborated with each other across time and space to identify an NGO that they could support. One member of each group was required to contact the organization to discuss their needs and requirements and articulate a 'brief'. The group then worked on the problem presented by the NGO and divided the workload among themselves to complete the task. Although the types of tasks that students worked on were diverse between groups, typical things would involve developing social media strategies and the mock-up sites, marketing and promotional plans, etc. The final solution was then submitted to the NGO for approval, deployment and handover. All this was done using relevant communication technologies negotiated between the students and the NGO.

Each group submitted a portfolio of their work to their host institution, i.e. HK students to their tutors in HK and AU students to their tutors in AU for evaluation. This portfolio included annotations of all their work, all communications between the students, the work submitted to the organization and a link to the outputs they created, feedback from the organization and a comprehensive personal reflection about their engagement in this activity including challenges and learnings. As part of the submissions students also had to do an in-class presentation explaining their work, and students from AU and HK had to participate, either via a live stream or (as it occurred more often) as a pre-recorded video as part of the presentation. That is, students from HK recorded a video for their group members in AU to use in their presentation in AU and vice versa.

The students' portfolios were marked using a set of common criteria such as:

- relevance and appropriateness of communication tools used;
- collaborative endeavour;
- identification of relevant information needed to solve real-life problem;
- evaluation and analysis of information obtained; and
- presentation of information to NGO and within portfolio.

Evaluation Voices

The feedback from the NGOs was extremely positive and shown in the sentiments in the following statement:

> Dear <group>, I want you to know how grateful I am for your devotion to our project, especially our media sites and fanpage. It is good to find such kind volunteers, and your dedication and hard work are greatly appreciated.
>
> (NGO located in Vietnam)

Similarly, the students enjoyed the opportunity to work with students from a different country and valued the experience. Many of their sentiments are reflected in the following statement:

> It is a pleasure for us to work with an overseas student. He (student name) helped us a lot in doing our project. The most interesting thing is that he can already share his work related to the NGO with us and we include his work in our report as well. His work is quite effective and useful for us which shows that our group members are hardworking and responsible students. We are very thankful to him for helping us a lot.
>
> (Student from HK)

Overall, the collaboration was deemed a success, with positive feedback from all those involved; yet, some challenges were encountered along the way.

Challenges Encountered

Authentic, collaborative cross-institutional projects, especially ones that involve students located in different countries, are uncommon within HE. Projects that also require students to work with external NGOs on real-life problems are even more rare. There were two main categories of challenges encountered in this project: first were the challenges that the educators faced while designing the learning activity across the two institutions, and second, the challenges the students had to face while engaging in the learning experience.

For the educators the major challenge was the fact that the two cohorts of students from the different institutions were studying two different courses. The educators needed to work and communicate well among themselves to refine the common elements of the two courses to let both students from AU and HK fully achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Due to the nature of this project there were some expected challenges for students, for example, working productively and harmoniously within their cross-cultural, cross-national teams to meet a real client brief. However, the depth and breadth of the students' work revealed that providing such authentic group work experiences actually negated some of the more 'usual' problems – the resistance, the complaints, the stress. Further, there were challenges that could not be predicted, but this was all part of giving students as much authentic experience as possible within a safe, structured learning environment.

Recommendations

For other educators interested in designing similar collaborative, cross-cultural learning experiences for their students, it would be recommended to find partner institutions and educators with similar ideas and goals. The educators involved

need to develop close working relationships and 'calibrate' their thinking and expectations well before the task is presented to the students and explore any potential challenges that may arise. In our case we used Google Docs to share all important files and worked on those together, synchronously and asynchronously. All discussions were conducted via phone and emails, and issues addressed in a collegial way.

Significantly both parties should be willing to be flexible in their approaches and willing to make changes to suit the schedules of other parties. In our experience these included negotiating start and end dates between AU and HK as the semester start and end dates were very different. Both educators had to make changes to their assessment schedules to ensure start and end times were somewhat aligned, and also ensure their students had ample time to prepare for the project as they worked across their different time zones and programme schedules.

Further, there also had to be negotiation around the assessments and common marking criteria. In our experience it worked well to have some important common criteria, but also provide flexibility to the individual institutions to expect certain things from their own students based on local curriculum and policy requirements.

Conclusion

Projects of this nature are challenging to get off the ground. In the first instance, identifying institutional partners who are willing to collaborate on cross-institutional projects for students can be challenging. Also, getting both parties to agree on common goals and criteria requires a significant amount of flexibility, understanding and cooperation. In many ways, once the teaching team is able to demonstrate these qualities, it becomes easier to transfer these experiences to the students.

The activity enabled students to be involved in the design of the activity, deciding the different roles of the group members, the types of communication tools and channels they preferred to use, the organization they wanted to work with, and then all the processes involved in the negotiation of the task and the decisions as to what the solutions should be. Engaging in this project the students collaborated together to identify needs and provide solutions: a social media strategy which the NGO can continue to use long after the students have completed their projects with them.

This rich collaboration obviously develops students' ability to communicate and negotiate across cultures; it involves them in authentic, collaborative project management; it builds confidence to undertake challenging tasks, with significantly nuanced appreciation of diverse ways of thinking and doing things. Students have also reported building life-long friendships with students from different countries. Many of the processes that students engage with through these cross-institutional, international projects help them develop many of the OECD (Martin, 2018; OECD, 2018) identified twenty-first-century skills.

Cross-disciplinary Collaborations for Sustainable Futures, and a Vital and Relevant Academic Community

Diana J. Pritchard, Helen Connolly, Amanda Egbe, Mohamed Saeudy, Paul Rowinski, James Bishop, Tamara Ashley and Nicholas Worsfold

- A cross-disciplinary group of academics joined forces to design opportunities to engage students in understanding and addressing locally relevant environmental, economic and social challenges.
- Our model can develop the relevant skills, knowledge and values that universities must foster if they are to prepare students for fast changing communities and workplaces, while supporting the communities they serve to transition towards sustainable futures.
- We harnessed our creativity in our autonomous 'community of practice' to organize university-wide events that comprise holistic, experiential and interactive pedagogical approaches.
- We created rich 'social learning' environments for students enhanced by the inclusion of municipal, community and business representatives who shared their expertise and created community-based learning.
- Through evaluation using complementary tools and methods we evidenced the impacts of the events, generating buy-in and resulting in the strategic adoption of our model.

Introduction

The challenges of our rapidly changing climate, environments, cultures, populations and labour markets require HE to 'recognise, own, and engage with the most difficult and intractable issues of our times' (Sterling, 2019, 61; Pritchard, forthcoming). This contrasts with prevailing practices that typically perpetuate paradigms of individualism, inequalities and unsustainability and the exploitation of the environment and people (Tilbury, 2011; Wals, 2015).

Reflecting the distilled features promoted by advocates for education for sustainability, UNESCO (2020) calls for provision that is *holistic, envisions change and achieves transformation* while *building solidarity*. This case study highlights how such education provision can be created and become embedded through staff-led, informal collaborations of a multi-disciplinary group operating outside formal governance structures. Our group, the Sustainability Forum (SF), is based at an English university and eight of us have contributed text or ideas which are reflected in this chapter.

We hope to contribute to discussions on collaboration by demonstrating the significance of cross-disciplinarity, respect for autonomous academic spaces, and the involvement of external organizations to achieve transformative outcomes that engage students, staff and communities in change.

Our SF practices take place at the University of Bedfordshire which is a WP and regional university and is characterized by a high proportion of students who are the first in the family to go to university, are mature and work part-time, while 60 per cent students are from Black, Asian and minoritorized ethnic groups.

Our Sustainability Forum

At our teaching-led institution, a group of us sharing concerns for climate chaos, environmental degradation, social injustice, human rights violations and conflict came together informally, across four faculties, to establish the SF in 2014. We are based in Performance, Art and Design, Media, Sociology, Biology, Sports Science, Business, Accounting and Construction and in professional services. The SF has included between twelve and fifteen academics (numbers fluctuating over the years), at different levels of seniority. Crucially, there is no formalized membership: we each define our degree of involvement.

By connecting with like-minded colleagues, we created a 'domain of interest' (Wenger, 1998) and overcame our isolation in our respective departments. We became energized socially and intellectually. Our early decision that the SF's primary aim would be to engage students in learning about sustainably galvanized us across the discipline spectrum. Specifically, we agreed to organize day-long university-wide events that focus on local manifestations of key global challenges. We have run these since 2016 and in this case study describe our ongoing and voluntary dedication to develop student learning.

Pooling Efforts to Hold Community-based Learning Events on Campus

For each event we selected a theme in which we have collective expertise, namely climate change, human rights and migration, peace and justice, and health and well-being, with a view to model practices which advance not just education *about* sustainability, but education *for* sustainability. This requires facilitating student learning about changes in the real world, developing their agency to identify creative solutions to problems and effecting changes in themselves and the wider world.

We achieved this by stirring our creativity and drawing on our pedagogic experience to design and pilot at the events a series of dynamic and immersive learning activities, underpinned by the concept of 'horizontal learning' (Freire, 2005) characterized by student partnership and co-creation. We included simulations, role-play and workshops which were delivered in plenary or parallel sessions to deliver curriculum, to identify project and community action projects and create networking opportunities.

Importantly, we pooled our contacts to invite representatives of relevant community, civic and business organizations to these events, effectively rendering our events 'mass-learn-ins' whereby everyone learnt from each other. These practitioners

shared their experiences and perspectives, generating information of value for the curriculum and as topics for authentic student projects, assessments or research. This also created rich 'social learning' environments and, more specifically, a variation of 'community-based learning'. Elsewhere such approaches have been demonstrated to develop academic learning and competences relevant for sustainability and the twenty-first century (Kuh, 2008; Wals, 2012).

While our events primarily served the students of SF members, we encouraged participation by students and staff from the wider institution. Our events have involved up to 200 people each time. Working alone, none of us individually could have achieved this scale of event, nor felt able to be so innovative or risk-taking: together, responsibility is spread.

Our Holistic Approach to Enhance Sustainability

The epistemological diversity represented in our SF enabled us to foster understandings of interrelated social, environmental and economic complexity. Consequently, our events were essentially holistic, nurturing learning – for students, staff and other participants – which is more than the sum of individual disciplines. Integrating disciplinary perspectives creates new transdisciplinary understandings of and responses to complex issues.

For example, at the event on modern-day slavery, the combination of students and staff from social sciences, media and construction led to wider understanding of potential violations of human rights on construction projects. This resulted in the expansion of awareness of project ethics as a core aspect of the taught curriculum. Likewise, we co-taught some sessions, for example, combining Biology and Sociology students to learn about the multiple and interrelated consequences of climate change for migration: both human and non-human. Further, we used our event spaces to exhibit work prepared by Art and Design students and showcase performances and media productions.

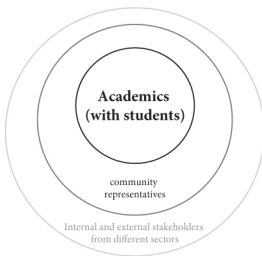
We curated all our events to envision change by offering presentations on historical trends. With a view to nurture competences that enable students to take action in the creation of alternative futures, we were able to harness academic, civic and practitioner expertise to provide background knowledge and understandings of past, present and projected future changes such as relating to increases in global temperatures or forced migration flows.

The heterogeneity of our event participants also served to lay the foundations for students to 'deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' (Freire, 2000, 34). Specifically, this mix served to leverage collective intelligence in the co-construction of sense-making of the challenges and the identification of feasible actions to address local problems (Markova, 2015). It also inspired change and increased the probability, as indicated elsewhere by research, that the solutions identified will be followed through with tangible change-making action (Peter & Wals, 2013).

We also created the contexts to enable students to identify where they can contribute through projects, research or voluntary work, or what authentic assessments academics could set by examining existing strategies and plans at different levels, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, relevant civic strategies or campaigns of local NGOs.

Collaborative Evaluations and Research

Although the principal activity of our SF was the organization of these events, our collaborations have extended, as represented in Figure 3.2, to include the evaluations of the short- and long-term impacts and outcomes of our events. We have captured these from digital feedback during the events, follow-up student and staff surveys, detailed analysis of student grades, interviews with students, including upon their graduation, and audits of course and module enhancements.



Activities

University-wide challenge-and community-based learning events

Short and long term evaluations of practices and impacts

Collective reflections

Pedagogic theory, scholarship and research

Peer-to-peer support and mentoring

Impacts

Transformative education
people
practices
institution

Staff development in teaching and learning

Community, solidarity and wellbeing

Engagement with and solutions for local priorities

Figure 3.2 The scope of the SF: Key partners, activities and impacts.

Findings: Achieving Education Transformations

Our results suggest the ways in which our events comprised transformative education for students (Mezirow, 1991). Many reported on the intense nature of the learning experience, one stating that 'this is the most [she had] ever had to think in [her] life!' on account of being required to engage with complexity, shift from being a passive to an active learner and gain new perspectives.

Students enthusiastically reported that their subjects 'came alive', while academics noted in our survey (Figure 3.3) that their students became more engaged in their studies, took increased ownership of them. Students also pursued activities of direct relevance to their degrees, future careers, gaining (and following up) tangible ideas for applied research projects or placements which reflect their inspiration to become

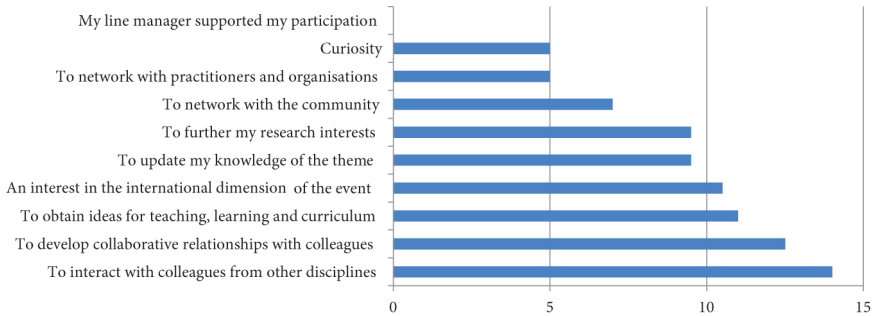


Figure 3.3 Academic observations of the impacts of SF events on students**.** The x-axis represents the number of responses of academic staff reporting each factor.

part of the solution. Academics also observed that students gained in confidence: a fundamental aspect of empowerment and a consequence of the social mix and ethos of co-production where students acknowledge that they were 'treated as equals when offering [their] ideas'. Importantly, students and staff reported they had 'serious fun' at the events, despite the weight of the existential threats that the events focused on and felt part of a vital community of learning.

As for academic staff, they both were motivated to attend the event and appreciated them because they facilitated connecting with colleagues from other subject areas, developing collaborative relationships and networking with external organizations (Figures 3.4 and 3.5).

Our events, as collective endeavours, recover for academics what Holmwood et al. (2016) identify as their loss of autonomy and collective influence over the direction of universities. The same staff survey also revealed longer-term education changes they had made, including curriculum changes, in at least twenty courses. This resulted in academics incorporating event themes and materials into modules, the design of authentic assessments and the creation of new modules.

This well-evidenced success was recognized which shortlisted us for a nationally prestigious Award for Teaching Excellence 2017. Our evidenced impact also secured university executive buy-in: our 'grand challenge model', community-based pedagogies and professional development approaches have all been incorporated into the university's new education and sustainability strategies.

Conclusion

Our SF work demonstrates the powerful contributions that collaborative practices can make to authentic curricula and powerful student learning. Through unleashing creativity and solidarity, our SF generated learning fit for our time of rapid continuous change. It offers a transferable model of practice indicative of what real-world learning could look like to develop students' understanding and embed education for sustainability. For academics, such collaboration provides relief from the feeling of disempowerment and isolation that they increasingly experience (Fazackerley, 2019).

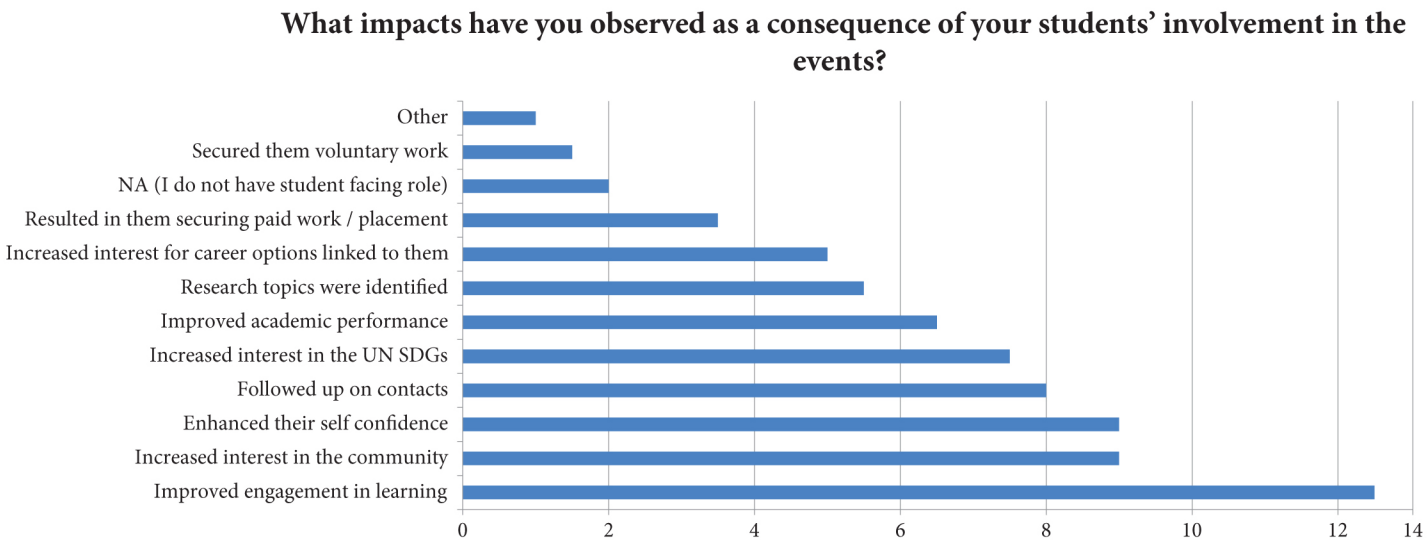


Figure 3.4 Motivation of academics to attend the SF events. The x-axis represents the number of responses from academic staff reporting because of each factor.

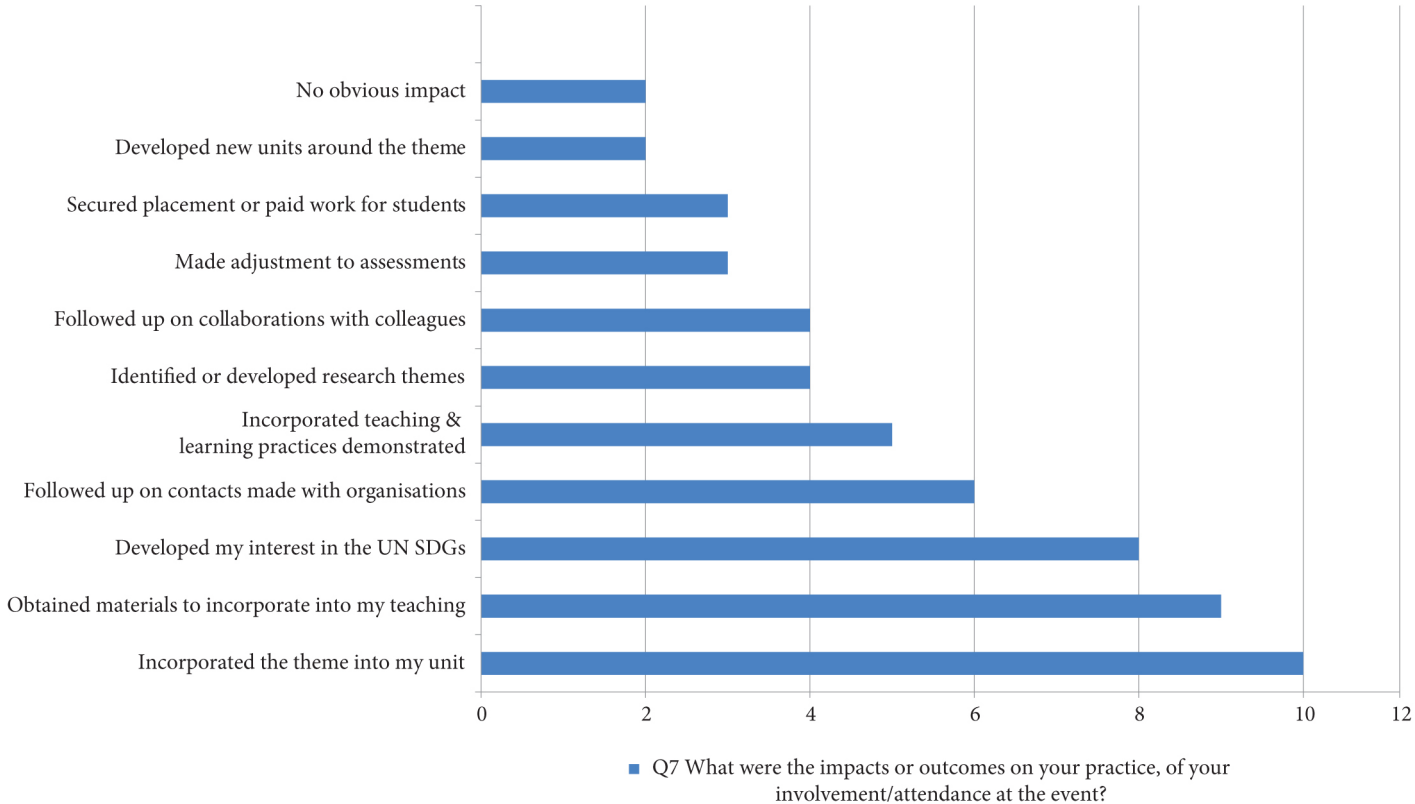


Figure 3.5 Impacts of academic participation in SF events on academic practices. The x-axis represents the number of responses of academic staff reporting each factor.

We consider our collaborative practices, a *hallmark* of a vital academic community, generating agency and contributing to the primary mission of HE: the social good, and – in the context of increasing crises – averting 'systemic global dysfunction' (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015). These collaborations also appear to relieve anxieties: there is something about being in a team where the burden of knowledge and creation of solutions are shared. Given the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, which spotlight the importance of relational well-being facilitated by such staff-student and collegial interactions (Singh, 2020), this approach gains even greater significance.

Although our work has had strategic impacts at our university, such collaborative practices and education for sustainability remain marginal. Despite sector frameworks incorporating cross-disciplinarity and sustainability into standards and expectations for HE (QAA/Advance HE, 2021), it retains subject silos and perpetuates administrative and bureaucratic systems that reward singular individual outcomes and curtail pedagogical transformations. The support, celebration and reward for collaborative practices have never been so urgent.

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